

Title: Support for Refugees coming to Canada

Originating Body: Woolastook Presbytery

Maritime Conference Action: Transmit with concurrence with a recommendation appended below

Financial Implications: Shared cost of full-time staff component

Staffing Implications: One full-time staff component

Proposal:

It is proposed to General Council by Woolastook Presbytery, through Maritime Conference that the 40th General Council confirm the United Church of Canada's responsibility in offering support to refugees, that the General Council recognize its vital role therein, and that General Council direct:

- 1) that the Sponsorship Holder Agreement (or other such agreement respecting refugees) be maintained;
- 2) that support as a liaison with the federal government for churches assisting refugees involved in private sponsorships be maintained;
- 3) that a General Council staff person be available on a full time basis to assist congregations and other bodies of the United Church to sponsor or host refugees and their families; and
- 4) that other interested courts of the church be consulted on the financing and administration of such a staff person.
- 5) And that the General Council invoke paragraph 524 (c) of The Manual stating that the Executive of General Council has no power to reduce the role of the United Church of Canada in offering support to refugees;

Background:

The United Church of Canada is a uniting church, offering welcome and hospitality to all. In this context, we recognize refugees as brothers and sisters, not only in principle, but also in deed and with a sustaining love. (There are numerous stories where lives have been saved by timely effective work, and other stories where lives have been lost if delays have been experienced.)

This work has been carried out by all levels of the courts of the church. However, since citizenship and immigration is a federal responsibility, the General Council support for this work is key. There are two essential elements for carrying out this support:

- 1) the Sponsorship Holder Agreement that the church, represented by the General Council, has with the federal government, and
- 2) the staff support of the General Council for the congregations, other courts of the church and other bodies of the United Church involved in the Government Sponsorship Program, the Immigration Visa Program, and other refugee support work. (An essential part of this work

is the liaison work with the federal government to avoid delays.)

In recent cutbacks by the Executive of General Council, the full time person supporting this work at the General Council level was replaced by a part-time person with a very limited numbers of hours, working out of New York City. Also, plans included a cutback in support for private refugee sponsorships. (These sponsorships have been nearly five times more cost effective in Woolastook Presbytery, increasing the number of refugees affected, by involving and organizing more people who want to assist financially. However, the role of the liaison person of General Council is essential in order that the refugees actually get processed and arrive.)

These changes have greatly reduced the ability of the other courts and bodies of the United Church of Canada to carry out its mission to offer welcome and hospitality to the world's refugees and their families.

This predicament was outlined in a proposal to Maritime Conference at its 2008 annual meeting that the Conference request the Executive of General Council take similar actions. However, to the best of the knowledge of Woolastook Presbytery, no answer has been received dealing with the specifics of the request. So the proposal is being made to the commissioners of General Council in order that they clarify that the Church still intends to offer its support to refugees, and because of the federal government's constitutional responsibility in this area, that this work needs to be supported at the General Council level in an effective way.

Note from the Annual Meeting of Maritime Conference:

The Annual Meeting of the Maritime Conference recognizes that the primary foci of this proposal is found in points #1, 2, 3 and 4 and that it remains the responsibility of the Commissioners to the 40th General Council to determine how to respond to point #5.